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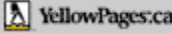
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Super Search » People Finder » Business Finder » OnLine Shopping » Careers » Autos 	<div style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">Festival keeps Elvis's name alive</div> <p style="margin: 0;">John P. McLaughlin</p> <p style="margin: 0;">The Province</p> <p style="margin: 10px 0 0 20px;"><i>Thursday, July 31, 2003</i></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="width: 60%;"> <p style="margin: 0;">ELVISMANIA MUSIC FESTIVAL With Randy Friskie, Ronnie McDowell, Freddy Cannon, Mitch Ryder and more; Fraser Downs Raceway, 176th St., Cloverdale, Aug. 1 to 3 (Tickets: Sat.: \$48.15; Sun.: \$53.15; Mon.: \$58.85 or \$149.80 for the weekend from Ticketmaster, 604-280-4444)</p> </div> <div style="width: 35%; text-align: center;">  </div> </div> <p style="margin-top: 10px; font-weight: bold;">Elvis as he was in 1957, a year before he did his army service.</p> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">One hates to be the bearer of bad news but I have it on excellent authority that Elvis Presley, contrary to wacko reports all over the Internet, is in fact and truth most decidedly, absolutely and incontrovertibly dead. Sorry.</p> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">This news comes from one Joe Esposito, former best pal and road manager to The King, who was among the first on the scene in the upstairs Graceland bathroom that fateful August afternoon 26 years ago; who was, in fact, the guy who rolled the body over --not a pretty sight, don't ask -- rode in the ambulance to Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis soon after, sat on the dais when the death was announced to the world and served as a pall bearer days later.</p>
	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: gray; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">ADVERTISEMENT</div> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 20px; font-size: 1.5em; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">  <p style="margin: 0;">Swing by The Golf Ball Store.</p> </div>

The guy knows, OK? He says Elvis is dead, hey, Elvis is dead. Are you listening Dr. Donald Hinton, delusional Missouri psychiatrist who's written a book claiming to have recently treated a white-haired, 67-year-old Elvis Presley?

"I did a radio show with that guy once," says Esposito. "The disc jockey called me to surprise him while he was on and he hung up when he heard I was on the show. But I look at it this way: it keeps Elvis' name alive."

Esposito met Elvis when both were in the army stationed in Friedberg, Germany. When their hitch was up in 1960 the 20-year-old Esposito, who had no idea what he was going to do in life, was invited to go to work for Presley.

"From that time until he passed away my whole life changed."

For 17 years Esposito was closest and the most responsible of The Guys, a loose collective of male payrolled employees, friends and hangers-on who surrounded Presley in a buddy bubble whether he was going to the bowling alley, Hawaii or on tour.

Along the way there was a wife and two daughters but Esposito will admit he was more married to Elvis. The wives were married, he'll say, but the guys were single. That first wife divorced him years ago.

And then of course there were the drugs, a quite staggering volume of prescription pain killers, downers, uppers and anything else that seemed like a really great idea at the time.

Since Elvis' death -- of "polypharmacy," it's worth noting -- Esposito has been asked more than a few times why none of the guys tried to prevent or at least help control their boss' runaway and ultimately lethal drug habit.

Quite sensibly he responds you can't control an addict, that all the guys were taking pills anyway and in fact they did frequently fill the gel caps with powdered sugar. Nevertheless, for all his worldly success, the King was on a destructo mission, had more doctors on call than most people have friends and all these years later the point seems, frankly, moot.

But dead or alive, the popularity of Elvis Presley has never waned. This weekend's Elvismania fest is the third such event in Canada this summer and includes such splashy elements as a classic car show, an amusement park and midway, entertainment from the likes of Dick & Dee Dee and the Tokens plus an Elvis Tribute Competition with Red Robinson, Bruce Allen and our own Tom Harrison judging.

Obviously people like Esposito, original guitarist Scotty Moore and drummer DJ Fontana, who will both also be here, are in big demand. At 65 Esposito is a raconteur at these confabs now, telling tales about the coolest friend he ever had.

"I tell people it's like I won the lottery when I got drafted," says Esposito. "What are the odds? Probably a million guys in the army at that time and I end up meeting Elvis and going to work for him. One day I'm in the army overseas in Germany and a month later I'm with Frank Sinatra, Joey Bishop and Sammy Davis Jr. down at the Fountanebleau in Miami, Florida. Boy, what a switch."